



Building Newsletter 3-1

Occupancy Classifications of Assembly Buildings

Interpretations of State and Local Building Codes
1998 California Building Code: Chapter 3
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I. Occupancy Groups

Section 202 of the Building Code defines *Assembly Building* as a building or portion of a building used for the gathering together of 50 or more persons for such purposes as deliberation, education, instruction, worship, entertainment, amusement, drinking or dining or awaiting transportation.

Some of the types of assembly occupancies (including drinking and dining establishments with less than 50 people) are defined below. See Table 3-A of the Building Code for a complete list of occupancy groups.

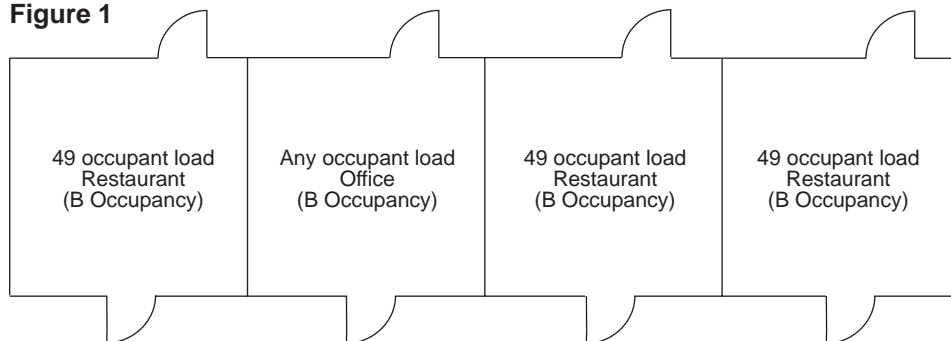
- A. A Group A, Division 1 (A-1) Occupancy is any assembly building or portion of a building with a legitimate stage and an occupant load of 1,000 or more.
- B. A Group A, Division 2 (A-2) Occupancy is any building or portion of a building having an assembly room with an occupant load of less than 1,000 and a legitimate stage.
- C. A Group A, Division 2.1 (A-2.1) Occupancy is any building or portion of a building having an assembly room with an occupant load of 300 or more without a legitimate stage, including such buildings used for educational purposes and not classed as a Group E or Group B Occupancy.
- D. A Group A, Division 3 (A-3) Occupancy is any building or portion of a building having an assembly room with an occupant load of less than 300 without a legitimate stage, including such buildings used for educational purposes and not classed as a Group E or Group B Occupancy.
- E. Drinking and dining establishments with an occupant load of less than 50 are not classified as assembly occupancies, but are included in this newsletter because of their relationship to adjacent assembly occupancies as illustrated in this newsletter.

II. Classification of Buildings

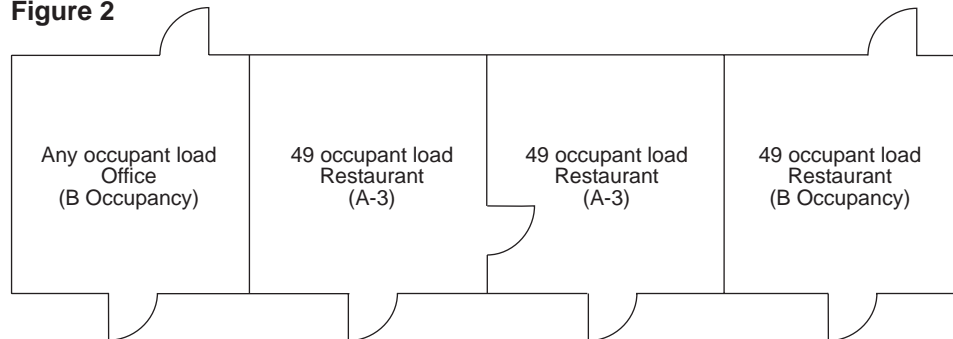
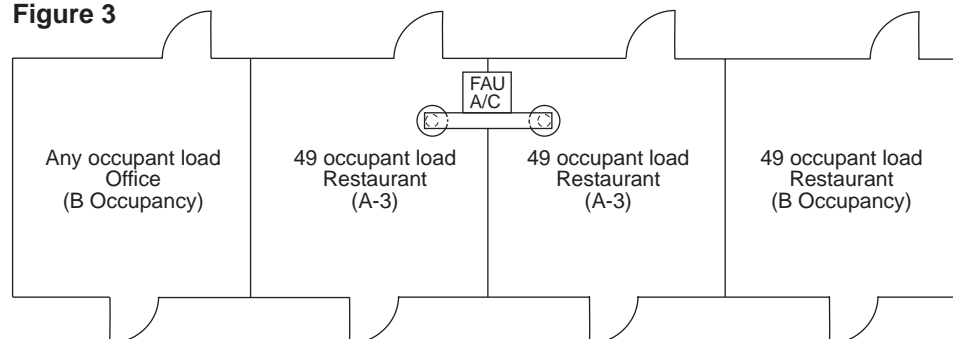
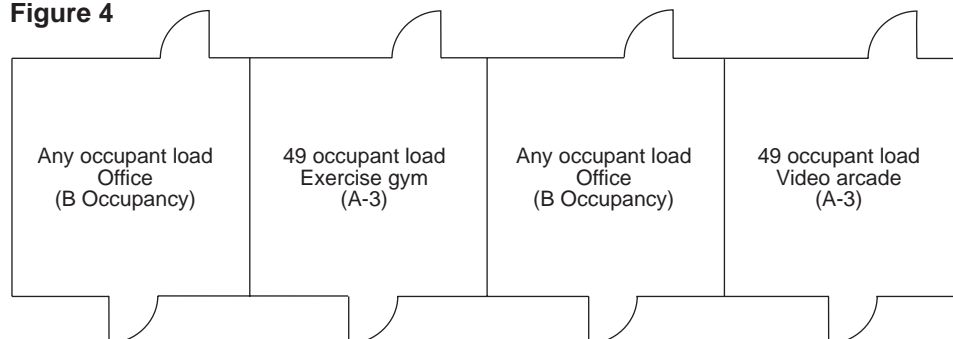
- A. In order to classify a building, the total occupant load of all assembly rooms and waiting areas shall be added together. The occupant load of kitchens, offices, storerooms, hallways and restrooms shall not be included in this total to determine occupancy classification. If the total occupant load is 50 or more, the building shall be classified as an assembly building. Occupant loads less than 50 shall be treated as a B Occupancy.
- B. The occupant load for lobbies or waiting areas in theaters and for waiting and standing service areas in restaurants and convention centers shall be computed based on an occupant load factor of 3 square feet per occupant. Other occupant load factors may be found in CBC Table 10-A and Building Newsletter 10-1.
- C. A special case exists for restaurants. A single building with several restaurant uses may contain a total occupant load of 50 or more but not be classified as an A-3 or A-2.1 Occupancy. Section 304.1 of the CBC classifies drinking and dining establishments having an occupant load of less than 50 as B Occupancies.
 - 1. In order to qualify as separate "drinking and dining establishments", the following conditions must be met:
 - a. Each restaurant use must have an occupant load of less than 50.
 - b. There must be no communicating openings between the restaurants.
 - c. Each restaurant use must have a totally independent exiting system.

An example of this type of building is shown in Figure 1.

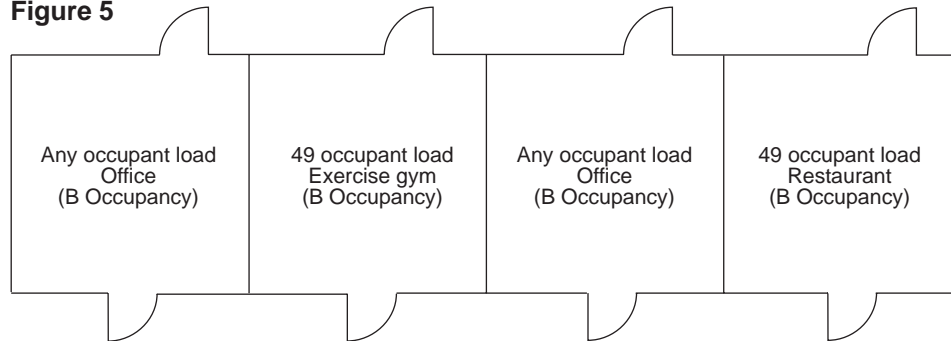
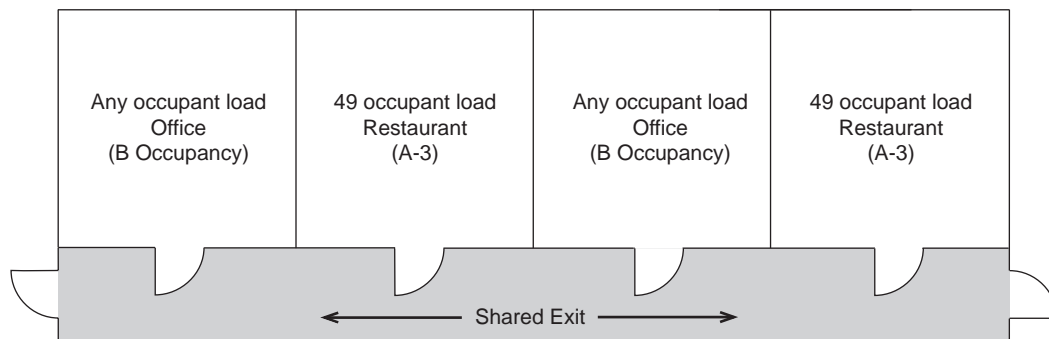
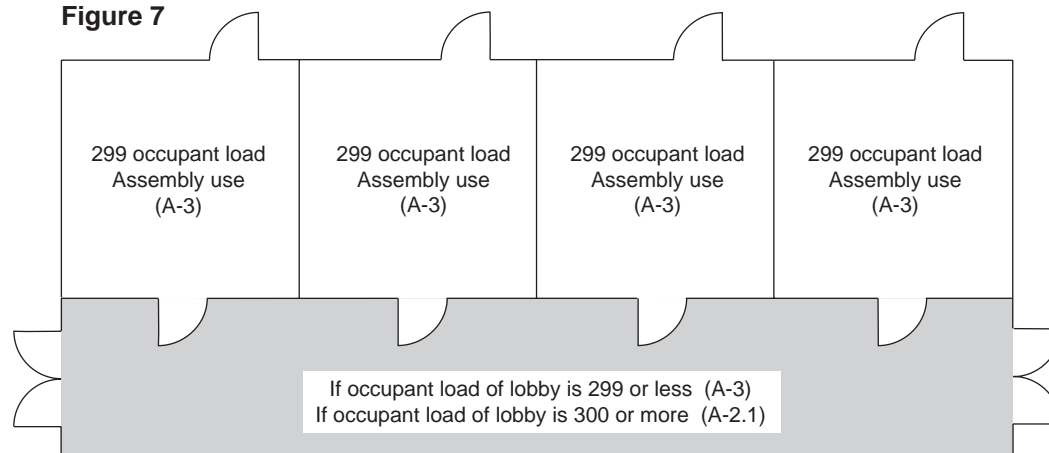
Figure 1



2. Figures 2 through 6 further illustrate this special case.
- In Figure 2 the two center restaurants become an A-3 Occupancy because there is a communicating opening (door) between the two restaurants.
 - The two center restaurants in Figure 3 would also be classified as an A-3 Occupancy because the restaurants share mechanical ductwork.
 - Figure 4 further illustrates the unique character of drinking and dining facilities. The video arcade and the exercise gymnasium each contain an occupant load of less than 50 with no communicating openings. However, the assembly areas are classified as A-3 Occupancies because they are *not* drinking and dining “establishments” and their combined occupant load is greater than 50.

Figure 2**Figure 3****Figure 4**

- d. The single exercise gymnasium in Figure 5 would be a B Occupancy because the combined occupant load of all assembly areas other than drinking and dining establishments is less than 50.
- e. Figure 6 illustrates the fact that these restaurants are A-3 Occupancies because their combined occupant load is greater than 50. The restaurants share a common exit system and, therefore, do not qualify as separate drinking and dining establishments.
- D. Assembly buildings without a legitimate stage shall be classified as A-2.1 Occupancies if any *one* room in the building has an occupant load of 300 or more. A lobby or waiting area to a theater or other type of assembly building shall be classified as an A-2.1 Occupancy if the occupant load in the lobby or waiting area is 300 or more. If there is no single room, lobby, or waiting area in the building with an occupant load of 300 or more, the assembly building shall be classified as an A-3 Occupancy. An example of this situation is illustrated in Figure 7.

Figure 5**Figure 6****Figure 7**

III. Occupancy Separations

Nonassembly portions of assembly buildings that are classified as B Occupancies shall be separated from the assembly areas by occupancy separations as required by Table 3-B of the CBC. The following occupancies, however, need not be separated from the uses to which they are accessory. See Section 302.1, Exception 2.

- A. Assembly rooms having a floor area of not over 750 square feet.
- B. Administrative and clerical offices and similar rooms which do not exceed 25 percent of the floor area of the

major use when not related to Group H, Division 2 and Group H, Division 3 Occupancies.

- C. Gift shops, administrative offices and similar rooms in Group R, Division 1 Occupancies not exceeding 10 percent of the floor area of the major use.
- D. The kitchen serving the dining area of which it is a part.
- E. Customer waiting rooms not exceeding 450 square feet when not related to Group H Occupancies and when such waiting rooms have an exit directly to the exterior.